

Wendell Beckwith fonds

1963-1980

174 cm of textual records

Biographical Sketch

Wendell King Beckwith (born 9 Sept. 1915 at Whitewater Wisc., died August 1980 at Whitewater Lake, Ont.) was the son of Raymond Beckwith and Laura Imogene King. His father was a design engineer and inventor. Wendell had a high-school education and attended the University of Alabama (Botany) for one year only. His knowledge of engineering and science was to a large extent self-taught. He worked for a time as a draughtsman and, in the late 1930s to the 1950s, as a research engineer for the Milwaukee Electric Tool Co. as chief development engineer and/or vice president where he designed and patented for the company several pieces of equipment. In ca.1945 he left to set up his own development lab in Whitewater, Wisc., and also worked until 1955 as a freelance consultant with Parker Pen, one of his major clients. He did not invent the ball-point pen as is sometimes suggested, but received four patents covering writing apparatus and machinery.

In ca.1955-56 Beckwith left his job, wife (Betty Mobert) and family (five children: Wendell Jr., David J., Laura, Imogene and Kathleen, who later married Harry Worth) probably due to his desire to do "pure research" into gravitation and radiation. In 1957-1958 he was known to be working for the Gravity Institute in New Boston analyzing submissions for funding. By the late 1950s, however, he was searching for a place of solitude in which to conduct his research. After spending three years at various locations in Northern Wisconsin he moved, in 1961, to Best Island on Whitewater Lake in Ontario. There, with funding from Mr. Harry Wirth, an unrelated American businessman, a cottage was built and Beckwith began his research. Until 1969 he wintered in Wisconsin and spent the rest of each year at the cottage. From 1969 onwards he stayed at Whitewater Lake year round and received frequent visits from friends, members of the group "Outward Bound", and the local Native people. From Feb. 1971 to 1980 his friend Rose Chaltry of Minneapolis lived with him during the summer months.

In the mid 1970s, Beckwith's funding agreement with Wirth broke down after which he relied on friends, family and Rose Chaltry for supplies. Beckwith's status in Canada was that of an illegal alien until 1974. He refused to apply for landed immigrant status, declaring himself a "citizen of the world". Because of his "great assistance to the Indian population of the area" he was granted ministerial permission to stay. His refusal to apply for a land use permit, until 1977, led to protracted negotiations with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

His research was done mainly in the winter. He would sit down before a blank sheet of paper each day and work on whatever topic interested him. The sheets he'd put into binders or folders. He took constant astronomical and meteorological observations. He formalized an agreement with the Ontario government in September 1979 whereby he bequeathed his research notes, papers and experimental apparatus to the people of Ontario on his death.

His research interests were broad, ranging from the magnetic and astronomical forces of the galaxy and historic human migrations to the pyramids and Stonehenge. He showed a great interest in "pi", the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter and he was intrigued by such numbers and how often they recurred in nature. He was also concerned with the connections between astronomical events and the migration of large groups of people. His work

suffers from several drawbacks: notably his preference for "popular" as opposed to academic works of science and history for his information and his 1930s high school math.

Scope and Content

The Wendell Beckwith Papers contain the correspondence and scientific notes of Wendell King Beckwith, scientist. Principal series include: incoming and outgoing correspondence with relatives, visitors to his cabin at Whitewater Lake, Ontario, and those interested in his research and lifestyle; sketches, plans and drawings of some of his inventions and buildings; audio tapes; and bound and unbound scientific notes.

Beckwith established his own dating system, abandoning the normal calendar and it seems he began numbering days from the point he moved permanently to Whitewater Lake. This allows for some order to be made of the records though, unfortunately, most of his scientific material is undated. Dates indicated below are approximate except where confirmed by Beckwith. To some extent the dates of documents can be determined by the handwriting as he seemed to have developed a shake in his later years not present at the beginning. This, however, is unreliable. The records were gathered up in haste, years after Beckwith's sudden death in 1980, and placed in boxes apparently in no particular order. This order has been retained with a few exceptions. His papers appear to contain both rough and finished notes. The former may be nothing more than a few calculations scrawled on a page while the latter are often neatly handwritten with full colour diagrams. He often refers in his rough notes to a diagram or set of figures as having been "plated". This probably means that the rough notes have been rewritten, with colour plates, in a more finished form, possibly indicating a manuscript in preparation (though there is no indication of intended publication).

Series A 58/1/1 - Correspondence - outgoing - 5cm. - [1963]-1980

Wendell Beckwith's outgoing correspondence. Many undated. Many of the letters are very long (one over 100 pages) and some are indicated as not having been sent. All are handwritten in his distinctive style. Beckwith only identified his correspondent by first name so reference to incoming letters is necessary to determine full names. While he starts with local news, all of his letters quickly devolve into treatises on his latest scientific work and thus may be useful as guides to the theories contained in his notes. Letters are in four files and one notebook. A few are photocopies of letters sent to "Alice" and obtained by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications after Beckwith's death.

Series A 58/2/1-19 - Correspondence, incoming - 40cm - 1963-1980

Correspondence addressed to Wendell Beckwith from his family, friends, relatives and business associates. In particular are letters from his father's second wife, Gertrude, his sister Eleanor Lawton (her children are Stephen, James K., Thomas, and Charles D.), Wendell's children (see biographical sketch below) and Mr. Harry Wirth. Filed according to year. All files in this series are at present **restricted**.

- 1) 1963 (3 files)
- 2) 1964 (3 files)
- 3) 1965 (3 files)
- 4) 1966 (3 files)
- 5) 1967 (2 files)
- 6) 1968 (2 files)
- 7) 1969 (1 file)
- 8) 1970 (1 file)

- 9) 1971 (1 file)
- 10-11) 1972-1973 (1 file)
- 12) 1974 (1 file)
- 13) 1975 (1 file)
- 14) 1976 (2 files)
- 15) 1977 (2 files)
- 16) 1978 (2 files)
- 17) 1979 (2 files)
- 18) 1980 (1 file)
- 19) undated (1 file)

Series A 58/3/1 - Correspondence, incoming (Rose Chaltry) - 3cm. - 1966-1978

The incoming correspondence of Rose Chaltry of Minneapolis and Whitewater Lake, Ont., who from 1971-1980 stayed with Wendell Beckwith during the summer months. One file. Presently **restricted**.

Series A 58/4/1 - Personal papers - 2cm. - 1963-1980

Personal papers of Wendell Beckwith including a chart outlining his father's life; a deed of gift of his possessions to the Province of Ontario; prices of indian artifacts bought and sold; birth certificate; prescriptions; accounts and letters of accounts with Hudson's Bay Co. Store and various people in the vicinity of Whitewater Lake (mostly 1964-67); identification; photos from wallet; clippings. One file.

Series A 58/5/1 - Sketches and drawings - 4cm. - 1963-1970s

Sketches and drawings by Wendell Beckwith of buildings, furniture, beadwork designs, animals, inventions, instruments and advertisements done for friends. Two files.

Series A 58/6/1 - Audio tapes - 8 tapes - [1963]-1980

Audio cassette tapes of Wendell Beckwith talking about his work (four tapes), from relatives (three tapes), and of music performed by Indian musicians possibly from the Whitewater Lake area ("Relocation XIT" is written on the cassette). Sound quality of the tapes of Beckwith himself are not good.

Series A 58/7/1-12 - Scientific notes (bound) - 40cm. - 1963-[1979]

Wendell Beckwith's research notes on a variety of scientific problems which he tackled while at Whitewater Lake. It was his habit to start with a blank sheet of paper at the beginning of each day and devote himself to "pure research". These notes, bound in binders, scribblers and with string are the result. Some appear to have been re-written in more finalized form possibly as a manuscript. Notes are mostly undated and many were received in random order, stuffed into boxes. Attempts have been made to resurrect the original order within binders. Subjects indicated below are often unsure.

- 1) Red binder, undated, on the sphere and the cube. Notes are divided into numbered sections.
- 2) Black binder, undated, on the motion of the planets.
- 3) Black binder, undated (Beckwith's own dates are: days 903- 926), on geophysics and planetary motion. Includes colour plates and diagrams.
- 4) Red binder, 1974, on oscillation and planetary curves, Kepler's equation, time and distance, water density, sphere-cube infusion, capillary curve and population explosion and water drop universal size studies.
- 5) Blue binder, late summer 1974, on the development of the spiral (various studies) and gravitation.
- 6) Blue binder, ca.1973, on Sun-Moon-Earth data and geophysical maps.

- 7) Brown binder, winter 1973-1974, on pi, sphere-cube, gravitation, planetary motion, geophysics and various other subjects.
- 8) Spiral Notebook, undated, on pi, sphere-cube, planetary movements, etc. (appears to be in relatively finished form)
- 9) Spiral Notebook, ca.1974, on pi, harmonics, the interaction of objects, etc. (headed "Book 3")
- 10) Spiral Notebook, undated, of rough calculations on stonehenge and geophysics.
- 11) Spiral notebook on diagrams and notes, undated
- 12) Spiral notebook, undated, subjects unknown
- 13) Rough notes, possibly spring/summer 1972, subjects unknown
- 14) Notes on various topics, possibly spring 1972

Series A 58/8/1 - Scientific notes (files) - 32cm. - 1971-1979

The scientific notes of Wendell Beckwith contained in 24 files. Most are rough notes though some contain colour plates of diagrams, mostly of the Earth and drawing of inventions such as an outboard motor and a ball point pen. Files are arranged chronologically as best can be determined. Notes were received largely in random order except for those contained in old folders.

Series A 58/9/1 - Scientific notes, current - 32cm. - 1979-1980

Files of notes in use at the time of Beckwith's death in 1980. Each is labeled with subject including gravitation, math and trig. procedures, time, numbers, pi, carbon dating, circles, planetary motion, the chromatic spectrum, tree-ring studies, polar axis movement, and Stonehenge. Also contains daily logs of observations (astronomical and weather mostly) and various publications relating to Stonehenge. Most files have been labeled and created by Beckwith.

Additional Information

Custodial History - The Government of Ontario legally transferred Beckwith's papers to the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society in 1988 before which they were stored at the Thunder Bay Museum. Legal ownership of the material was challenged unsuccessfully in the courts by Harry Wirth before transfer to the Museum Society.

Associated Material - See 989.103 for artifacts and photographs that came with the papers.

Related Material - See biographical file for Beckwith.

Restrictions - Incoming correspondence is currently unavailable for research.